

## Vale Photos of the early 1900's

### Introduction.

This is the first of two groups of pictures of the Vale from about 100 years ago which were made available to the website by Pat Miller of PA Tyres at Jamestown. Most of the photos are already on view on the website dispersed over many different articles. We have collected them together and added a short commentary to each photo. One or two show some details which we have previously overlooked e.g. Photo 5 shows the new poles which were to carry the overhead wires for the Jamestown tram while they were in the process of being erected.

Apart from the 2017 photo of the Fountain, all of the photos were originally taken in black and white and colour was added by hand tinting before printing. The photographs were originally taken to be used as post cards as is clear from the titles on most of them.

A second group of photos will follow shortly.



### 1. Main Street Alexandria 1905 from Bridge St looking south - villas on west side of Street

This was a favourite spot for photographers taking pictures in Alexandria – the junction of Bridge Street and Main Street - and there is another one from a slightly later date and of a slightly different scene immediately below. This one was taken about 1905, 2 years before tramlines were laid on this stretch of road and 3 years before the trams started running. The picture concentrates on the west side of the Street, although the buildings on the east side, including the Albert Hotel, are visible enough. What is striking is that the buildings on the west side as far as the eye can see, are virtually identical to those of to-day. The two oldest houses in the photo are the one which sticks out from its adjacent neighbours and the one immediately beyond it. Both date from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the furthest away one was

the original Rowan Tree Bank. That name was acquired by the building on the corner in the right foreground, which has retained it to this day, but which was built much later in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The shop in foreground is now a hairdresser, but has previously been, amongst other things, an electricians and the Vale of Leven Travel Agency. All of the villas which still stand to-day on the west side of Main Street were built before 1905.



## 2. Main Street Alexandria looking south from Bridge Street

This photo is taken from almost exactly the same spot as the first photo, but with a slightly different orientation. It was also taken a few years later than the first one because there are tram lines in it. It probably dates from about 1908 -10. The buildings on the immediate left, the tram lines and the horse and cart era have all passed into history, but all the other buildings are just as they are just now. The main building on the left was the Albert Hotel, later the Griffin and ultimately the Alexandria Hotel. Beside it were a couple of shops, one belonging to the Co-op, the other one a newsagents. They were all demolished to be replaced (after some years as an unsightly gap site) with the flats and offices which now occupy the corner. The Alexandria Quoting Club was in behind the Hotel, with an entrance from Bridge Street.





### 3. Leven Street and Parish Church Renton

This photograph was taken about 1905, and although a few houses have been added including one on the site of the sheds on the right hand side of the street, the scene remains instantly recognisable to-day, so little has changed unlike in most of the rest of Renton. The Street was part of the southward expansion of Renton in late 1880's – early 1890's, while the church itself was built in 1891-2 opening in December 1892. Like the other parts of the southern development such as John and Alexander streets most of the buildings were built with red sandstone from local quarries including Millburn quarry.



#### 4a. The Fountain Alexandria c 1904 children bare feet and Rob Roy Tavern

This is a well known photo of the Fountain looking north and contains lots of items of interest. Firstly there is the Fountain itself which is enclosed by the original set of railings which were taken down to be melted into munitions and not replaced for decades. Then there are the children probably coming home from the three schools in Alexandria at that time: North Street Roman Catholic school, Main Street school and the Vale of Leven Academy which had a primary as well as a secondary department at that time. Most of the school children in the foreground really are barefooted, so it's not just an old-wives tale that children used to go to school barefooted. Just discernible at the top left of the picture is a replica fish's head which was advertising a fishmonger's shop.

Across the road at the top of Bank Street, occupying what was latterly Frank Melvin's shop is the Rob Roy Tavern. The building itself was built about 1860 and features as a Grocer's shop in photos of the Old Oak Tree. It didn't survive much longer as a pub. Of architectural interest in that building is the fact that there is a chimney head immediately above the middle window. Did that mean that that was a false window, or does it mean that the chimney was built at an angle leading up to the chimney head? It was a real window and the chimney was built at an angle.

Just beyond that are a couple of shops, one of which was Ross's Dairy for many years and beyond that is an old building with an external stairway which was demolished in 1914 and remained a gap site for 100 years until the current impressive redevelopment of that side of the Fountain. Beyond North Street the buildings have remained almost the same over the last century. There are no tram lines and the photo is usually dated as being taken in the summer of 1904





#### **4b. The Fountain 2017 taken from the same spot**

This is the same view of the Fountain and Main Street Alexandria taken in January 2017. The buildings in the foreground on the east side of Main Street and Bank have all been replaced as far along as North Street by the new housing development for the Caledonia Housing Association built by Robertson's of Dundee. Photographs don't quite do justice to the new houses which blend in very well with the area and provide some much-needed rejuvenation for the area.

At the end of the first row of new houses a gap has been retained where the entrance to Alexander or Croft Street is but the area has been pedestrianised and there is now no direct access to Alexander Street from Main Street. A mixture of stone blocks and tubs with trees have been placed in the space which will hopefully provide some seating close to the Fountain.



##### 5. Fountain Alexandria looking down Bank Street, tartan edges, new tram poles

This photo is a post card with a tartan surround, a decoration that remained popular for years with manufacturers. It contains many familiar sites such as the Liberal Association rooms on the immediate left. This building had previously been the Black Bull Inn and there is a short history of the building on the web-site. Other buildings on the left hand side of Bank Street include Stevenson's Building, dating from 1905 and still standing and Weir's Buildings, 1893, which features prominently on the list of "Crimes against the Vale" - fine buildings which were unnecessarily demolished in the 1970's and 80s. There is one feature of this photo which isn't immediately obvious, although they are prominent enough, which allows us to date it pretty accurately. That is the four tall poles, one none too vertical, which stand at the roadside. They are the poles which carried the electricity wires for the trams, and they were being put into place for the Jamestown spur of the system when this photo was taken, which dates it to 1908. It's the only photo which we have that shows evidence of the building of the tramline.





## 6. Front of Argyll Motor Works

Again a popular photo almost certainly taken around the time of the opening of the works in 1906 when the building as in pristine condition and still carried the title "Argyll Motor Works" above the main door. In fact that facade has remained in excellent condition in the 110 years or so since it was built.





## 7. Bonhill Bridge and Dalmonach Works c 1903/4

Another tartan-fringed photo, probably dated c 1903/4, showing the second Bonhill Bridge, the one which replaced the Bawbee Brig in 1898 and was itself replaced in 1987 by the present bridge. In the background is Dalmonach Works, by then owned by the Calico Printers Association of Manchester, with smoke pouring out of one of its chimneys. The site has since 2007 been occupied by private housing. There is also a good view of the row of shops facing the bridge which remained virtually intact until its demolition in the 1970s.

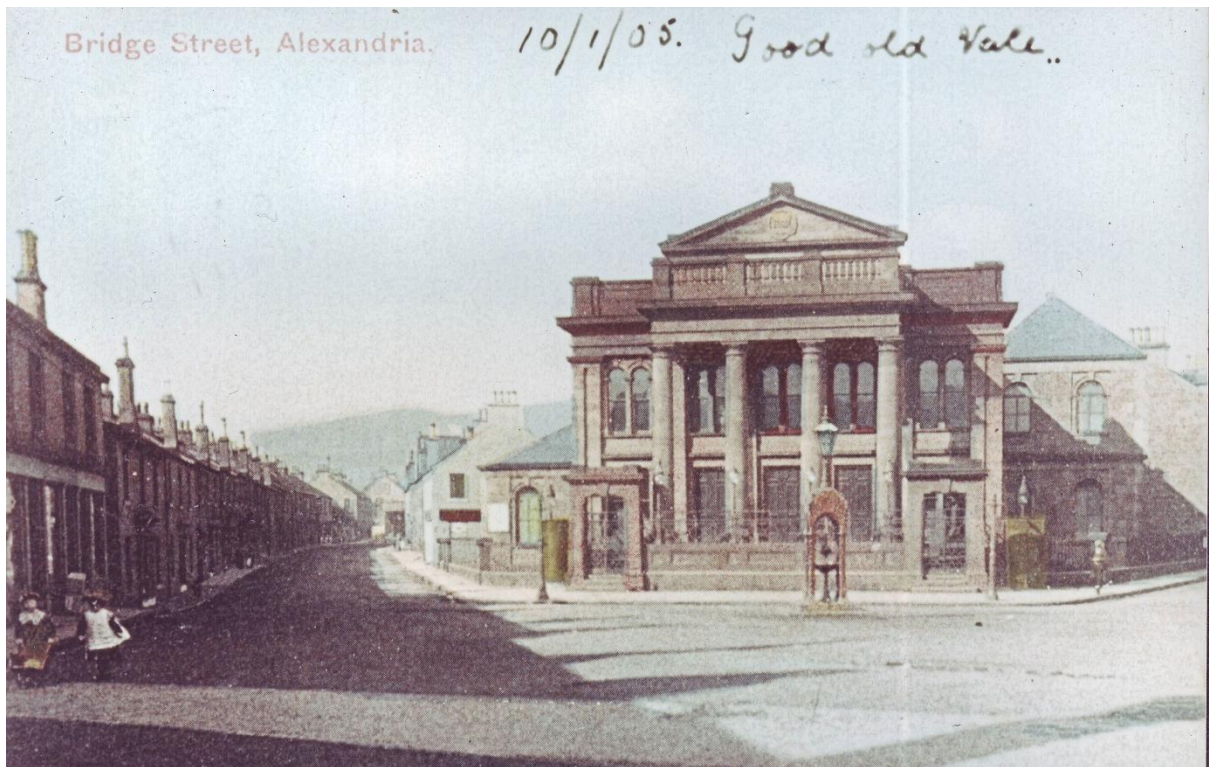


## 8. Front of Balloch with ice-cream cart

This photo of the Front of Balloch with children gathered round an ice-cream cart dates from 1905. Note that the children are all wearing shoes. The buildings all look very similar to the ones standing there to-day and date from about 1884 when they replaced older ones. In fact some of them have been rebuilt not once but twice since 1905 and now house Corries restaurant, Palombo's Fish Restaurant, Robert Dawson's Waterhouse Inn, and Wizgonies. There was an unusual twist to this photograph a couple of months ago when Nancy Crombie identified one of the children as being her late husband's uncle, Harry Crombie.

The entrance between the two walls on the left took you into Moss of Balloch Park and these walls enclosed the Park until the 1960's.





### 9. Bridge Square, The Hall and Bridge Street 1905

This photo dates from the early 1900's – the January 1905 date doesn't represent when it was taken. Apart from the Hall and the two buildings immediately behind it in Bridge Street and Bank Street respectively, all of the other buildings visible in the foreground of the photo have disappeared. One of them now houses the Laughing Fox pub with that gable-end window still featuring on the wall's mural and the other Morrison & Ritchie the butcher. The drinking well is also long gone; no one is sure when it was removed but it doesn't appear in post-WW2 photos and it was probably removed long before that.





## 10. Mossview & Dalvait Road Balloch c 1907

The east side of Dalvait Road has changed remarkably little since this photograph was taken about 1907. The Mossview shop was then a general store and post office, owned by J T Ferguson who was also the Bonhill Parish Councillor for the area. It is now of course a hairdressers and chiropodists. The size, or rather the lack of size, of the telegram boy, standing with his bicycle outside the shop is quite striking. It's the only photo we have of a telegram boy from that era. The two red-sandstone buildings immediately adjacent to Mossview were built by the Vale Co-operative Society, which had a shop in the buildings, now the chemists, and were completed in 1906, while further along is Charles Terrace which is the grey-coloured building towards top left of the photo. It was built by the UTR in 1900 for its supervisors and foremen. There have been more substantial changes on the west side of Dalvait Road. The building on the corner, with two sets of steps leading into it is now the Doghouse Bar and Lounge but it's still the same footprint and external walls of the one in the photo. It has had many owners and uses since the photo was taken, including being Rocicholli's Ice Cream Shop and Cafe, latterly with a transport cafe in the end part of it, and Ray's of Balloch before being acquired in 1974 by Jimmy Goodwin who turned it into a lounge called The Baron. When he added a public bar he called it the Doghouse which is now the name of the whole hostelry. The rest of the west side of the road stayed very much as in the picture for the next 80 years or so until the present private housing estate of Dalvait Gardens was built on the fields which lay behind the hedge on the right. The tall trees in the middle of the photo stood at the entrance of the avenue down to Tigh Nairn or Dalvait House, which was the residence of the Nairns who owned the buildings at the Front of Balloch, Fairview Quarry, Bankhead and what became the Radium Works. They sold these properties immediately after World War Two. Freddy Arcari bought Tigh Nain and the buildings on the Front of Balloch and the website tells of what he used that fine mansion for.



## 11. The Christie Park Bandstand c 1902

The story of the laying out of the Christie Park is told on the website. Far from being an act of personal benevolence on the part of John Christie, after whom it is named, the UTR withheld the annual bonus from its workers in Alexandria – but significantly not in Renton –



to pay for the Park. Naturally enough the workers were not consulted and to add insult to injury the Park was then named after Christie. For the workers and their families it was “the Bonus Park” for the next 50 years. The grandstand was well used, concerts being held there every week or so in the summer months while it was also used as a platform by politicians during election campaigns. So it had a high profile in Alexandria. Why and when it was removed remains something of a mystery: the best guess is probably in the 1970’s after the local government re-organisation of 1974. At about the same time the glass shelter in the north-western corner of the Park was dismantled. There were rumours that both are in storage and while that might have been true for a few years, it seems very unlikely now. One part of the bandstand still remains, of course – the concrete base – probably because it was going to be too expensive to remove it. Earth was heaped on top of it, and it was grassed over to convert it to a mound, just a few yards from the War Memorial. It certainly performs a useful function to-day because children love to climb it and roll back down – a few adults too.